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ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS AGAIN.

By S. S. KELLER.

The writer has little hope of seeing and not the least desire to see this protean pedagogical question of entrance requirements completely answered to the purring satisfaction of everybody or of even a majority.

After all it is the unsolved problem that keeps us on the qui vive. And let us have no compromises—at least not yet.

In confidential truth, it is the more or less exigent presence, is it not, of these pedagogical offspring, obstinately refusing to be put to bed, that keeps many of our solemn conferences from becoming strong rivals of the church services for the sedative championship?

As a matter of fact the characteristics of any specific set of entrance requirements are very largely determined by the ideals of the institution employing them, and still more by the seriousness with which that institution takes its ideals. Since such ideals are various, have never been standardized, and are subject to fluctuations, the probability of a universal creed fixing entrance requirements is about as great as that of a universal brand of politics.

However while we doubtless will fail to settle anything, the holding of the subject up to the light and the turning of it about always improves its definition and gives us all a chance to accelerate our pedagogical circulation by mutually hooting each other's opinions.

For the purposes of this brief discussion, then, let us say that schools of higher learning so called, may be divided roughly into three classes: First, those having no ideals that will not speedily evaporate upon exposure, or only those of such versatility as to fit almost any condition. Second, those that have, card indexed, a complete set of excellent ideals of highly respectable lineage. They never cause any excitement, but are often admired by eminent visitors. Third, those that have a virulent attack of ideals (that often keeps the temperature rather high) and be-

lieve in these ideals fiercely, and it is to be feared, at times combatively.

With the first class this discussion is very little concerned. The chief ambition of such institutions is to acquire merit in the educational census reports, their annual estimates of themselves being often remarkable contributions to that *sui generis* but always vivacious form of fiction known as "catalogues." No form of entrance requirement whose meshes were not large enough to admit anything numerically available could be popular with them. Happily they are few.

The second class comprises those schools that have a collection of thoroughly respectable ideals of hallowed memory, but nothing really vital roots in them; there is no cult, so to speak, based on them. If students come to them, worthy students, they will of course conscientiously lead them along the conventional paths to wisdom, but they are not convinced that their guidance is distinctly superior to that of any other institution whatsoever, but they are sure that he will not arrive out of breath. Any form of entrance requirement that is pedagogically genteel will suffice. Examinations are usually required but they are apt to be chastely conservative with something of the flavor of a sacrament.

It is much to be feared that the explorations of these institutions into the mental preserves of aspiring youth throw but a faint and fugitive light upon the problem of estimating their potentialities for educational progress.

The third class of institution is profoundly interested in the solution or in any worthy approximation to a solution of this problem.

As intimated it has dreams and they are very vivid and disturbers of the peace. It believes in the reality of these visions almost with ferocity. It is convinced that it has a genuine pedagogical mission, is on the trail for converts and doesn't care who knows it.

Also it may readily become a nuisance.

It is from the point of view of these restless parties that the writer would like to say what he may have to offer on what seems to him a desirable system of entrance diagnosis.

It is of course unnecessary to remark that an institution or an

individual that carries a high pressure of enthusiasm into an intellectual territory already well occupied is bound to lose cuticle and to acquire chastening experiences.

A casualty list of theories are of no interest here. Those that survived are the following:

There are three lines of inquiry in the attempt to diagnose the intellectual fitness of an applicant for admission to our educational midst: first, we want to know what sort of intellectual provender has been supplied and in what quantities; second, how much of this mental food has been digested and assimilated; third, what capacity has the candidate for further absorption and assimilation.

A fairly satisfactory answer to the first can be obtained from the preparatory school certificate, at least we find it so. To us this is the least important part of the triple inquisition, although it has a certain illuminating value; is in fact indispensable. Perhaps I should say that it is least important because it is so readily and definitely determinable.

The second item of information may we think be acquired to a fair degree of approximation at least, by a carefully prepared examination; one that not only tests the student's storage capacity but, as far as may be, his intellectual metabolism, if I may be permitted such verbal atrocity.

The most ingeniously devised and adroitly expressed examination will of course fall much short of realizing this ideal, but it helps our third inquiry.

I should like to say in passing that I fear secondary education lays an undue stress upon the importance of an agile and retentive memory. At any rate the student too often is obsessed with the idea that his admission to the questionable delights of a "higher education" depends very seriously upon his ability to set aside a large portion of his mental establishment as a mere temporary depot for facts, which he must keep in storage until he has passed his entrance exams. I am not at all sure that certain forms of entrance examination do not justify this attitude, but I deplore it none the less. This, however, is quite another tale.

Finally we should like to know what capacity the applicant may have for further absorption and assimilation.

Unfortunately the entrance examination has very little to say upon this most important question, and no instrument of precision has yet appeared that can rescue its solution from the well-founded suspicion that clings to purely subjective judgments. Modern psychology has heroically assumed the task of exploring the intellectual organisms of wisdom seekers, but it still remains to be seen what value will accrue from their efforts. It is to be hoped that the adventuring of psychology into this dimly-lighted territory may not result in its getting lost in a jungle of metaphysical subtleties. For it seems to the writer that this last inquiry into the preparation of the prospective student is much the most important.

For want then of a better method of procedure we have adopted what is known to us as the "personal interview," in the effort to locate intellectual leaks and limitation. It consists in a quiet talk as intimate and unconstrained as possible, wherein the candidate's clarity of view and expression along several lines is tested without his being aware of it. The success of such a process obviously depends entirely upon the tact and the acumen of the interviewer. If his method of approach is crude he will unmask his battery and put the student on his guard too much to secure accurate data from him. Besides he must be a keen and accurate observer of human nature especially in its juvenescent form. Sounds like a rather large contract doesn't it? But a first-class teacher ought to possess these traits ought he not? And besides no system of such sort could be expected to reach high efficiency without mishaps, or without passing through a period wherein its supporters did feel like taking to cover.

Each applicant is given a rating as a result of this beneficent "third degree," and this rating counts full share in the final decision as to the admission of such applicant. Of course after a few years of such practice results help much in checking up the fidelity of the interviewer's estimates, and it also improves his subsequent judgments.

A series of tests are also to be made by the department of psychology, which will be compared with the conclusions of the interviewers. It will at least be an interesting comparison and subsequent developments will be apt to show somebody up in

the line of vaticination. Prophesying is parlous and highly unprofitable work, but we all will take a fling at it now and then. Well this is not a prophecy, it is a sort of premonition, namely, if psychology makes good in getting mental X-ray pictures of applicants for admission to college or technical school, I believe that the examination test will be left wholly in its hands.

Neither do I believe there would be many mourners at the obsequies of the old-style examination, that bugaboo of student and unpopular assistant of faculty.

To an institution that believes devotedly in its mission, the question of entrance requirements at best is a perplexing and exigent problem. It is most anxious to secure abundant material in the shape of students upon whom to work its educational miracles, and yet it does not want to clog up its machinery with inept and hopeless specimens that will imperil its standards. It must find a dignified position between repellant exclusiveness and vulgar laxity. Will some brother kindly rise and tell us what that is?

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